

NATURAL LAW: REASON AND NATURAL INCLINATION

Natural law is based upon reason and natural inclination (*ST IaIIae.91.2*).

- Natural inclination makes us see something as good, i.e. as an end. If we did not have any natural inclinations, we would not discover that certain things are desirable. If we do not understand that they are desirable, we do not see that they are of value.
- Reason makes us understand ‘that’ and ‘how’ the things to which we have a natural inclination should be pursued. Not everything we desire is randomly to be pursued, but rather in such a way that the constitutive human desires, i.e. the most fundamental ones, are not frustrated. The most fundamental desires are not those that follow upon momentary feelings but those that are based upon natural inclinations.

FIVE NATURAL INCLINATIONS AND THE PRECEPTS OF NATURAL LAW

Every natural inclination gives rise to precepts of the natural law (*ST IaIIae.94.2*):

- (1) natural inclination for the good ⇒ “do good, shun evil”
- (2) natural inclination for the preservation of life ⇒ those means which help to preserve life belong to natural law. [E.g. “do not kill,” “live healthily,” etc.]
- (3) natural inclination for the preservation of the species, i.e. for generating ⇒ matters regarding sexuality and education belong to the natural law. [E.g. “do not commit adultery”]
- (4) natural inclination to know the truth ⇒ precepts such as “shun ignorance” [or do not lie]
- (5) natural inclination to live in society ⇒ precepts such as “do not offend anyone” [and generally the precepts of justice, e.g. “don’t take the goods of another.”]

OBJECTIONS/QUESTIONS:

- If the “good” is understood in terms of my inclinations and desire, does this mean that what I am supposed to do whatever my desires push me to do?
- How do the natural inclinations and reason found the precepts of the natural law? How is “don’t kill” or “live healthily” related to the natural inclination to preserve one’s life?

The point is not to appease my immediate desires, but my most profound desire for true happiness.

E. g. the natural inclination for the preservation of life, together with reason, leads to the precept: “Defend life, preserve life.”

NATURAL LAW AND SEXUAL ETHICS

The human desire for generating involves much more than just the sexual drive. It is not humanly satisfying to put children into the world and then to abandon them. Rather the desire for generating concerns not only the furthering of life, but above all an interest in the physical and spiritual well-being of the offspring.

Accordingly, for Aquinas the natural inclination toward the conservation of the species points to the importance of the education of the offspring.

Because of this, Aquinas emphasizes the importance of stable union between parents:

it is evident that the upbringing of a human child requires not only the mother’s care for his nourishment, but much more the care of his father as guide and guardian, and under whom he progresses in goods both internal and external. Hence human nature rebels against an indeterminate union of the sexes and demands that a man should be united to a determinate woman and should abide with her a long time or even for a whole lifetime. (IIaIIae.154.2).

In other words: The natural law doesn’t say: live out all your inclinations, but: live so that the true (or principal) end of your inclinations can be guaranteed:

All that renders an action inadequate to the end that by nature an action is supposed to have, is said to be against natural law. . . . Hence if an action is inadequate for an end in such a way that it makes the principal end impossible to achieve, it is directly prohibited by natural law by means of the first principles of natural law. (*In IV Sent.* d. 33 q. 1 a. 1 in corp.)

For humans, the true end of sexuality is not to generate a child—but to generate a child that can grow up in a good manner. (Hence true satisfaction follows from this.)

In fact, the precepts of the natural law do not command that we renounce on our greatest desires, but rather that we should live in such a way that the desires that originate in the natural inclinations to the good, to life, generating, truth, life in society/friendship might not be frustrated.